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Context Aware Computing Devices and Methods

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TECHNICAL FIELD

This invention relates to generally to the area of context-aware computing or ubiquitous computing.

BACKGROUND

The World Wide Web (WWW) was created to make content available from any source in any location around the world. Users of the Web are able to generally access a seemingly infinite number of resources via the Web. The Web has been highly successful in this regard. Yet, with the evolution of the Web, certain needs remain largely unmet. Specifically, people continue to have a need to access information that has a contextual aspect to it. That is, often times, individuals will find themselves in a computing environment that carries with it a certain context. Yet, the context of the environment cannot be easily incorporated into the present computing environment. As an example, consider the context of location. People generally have a need to access information, data, resources and the like, that have geographic dimensions to them. For example, individuals may desire to take advantage of services or products that are close in proximity to where they currently are located. In this regard, it is desirable to understand the individual's contextual location so that services, goods and the like can be made available to the individual. As "eCommerce" continues to grow in importance, the necessity of bringing people, places, services and goods together in an efficient manner will become critically important.

To date, many attempts have been made to bring people, places, services and goods together. These various attempts have generally approached the problem from different directions in an often times incompatible manner. As an

example, consider the context of location. Some services have attempted to bring people and services together by defining large databases that maintain information about the services. For example, a list of restaurants may be maintained in a web accessible database where each restaurant is associated with a zip code in which the restaurant is located. When a user desires to locate a particular restaurant, they might simply enter the zip code where they are located to see a list of corresponding restaurants in that zip code. From the list of restaurants, they might be able to select one or two restaurants of interest. This approach is undesirable for a number of reasons. First, the operation of the system is dependent upon a central server that is responsible for receiving user queries and executing the queries to return the information to the user. In the event the server fails, so too does the service. In addition, this particular service might be suited to finding restaurants, but possibly not other businesses. In addition, the granularity with which the results are returned to the user may foist some of the search burden on the user (i.e. the user gets a list of restaurants in a nearby zip code, but has to further explore the list to select which ones are of interest). Further, the list of restaurants may include some restaurants that are blocked by some type of a physical barrier (i.e. a river, mountain, etc.) that makes the distance, as the crow flies, unroutable.

Providers of services and products want to be connected to nearby end-users. End-users want to consume these services and goods at the closest and most convenient location. Acquiring the services of a dentist or a plumber that lives somewhere "out on the net" is not appropriate if you need them to fill a cavity or unclog a sink. Looking for the nearest hotdog while in a stadium requires you to stay in the stadium.

1 There is an unsolved need to be able to create context-aware computing in
2 which computing devices can participate in their particular context. In specific
3 circumstances, there are needs to provide relational position awareness among
4 physical locations in both public and private views of the world. To date,
5 however, there is no one standardized view of the world that would unlock the
6 potential of context-aware computing. Context-aware computing is much more
7 than just position awareness—although this is a very big field in and of itself.

8 This invention arose out of concerns associated with developing a
9 standardized, context-aware infrastructure and related systems to unlock the
10 potential of context-aware computing.

11 12 SUMMARY

13 Context aware computing systems and methods are described. In the
14 described embodiment, one or more hierarchical tree structures are defined that
15 uniquely identify geographical divisions of the Earth and/or physical or logical
16 entities. Each tree has multiple nodes and at least one node from each tree is
17 linked. Goods and services can be associated with individual nodes on the tree,
18 the nodes providing a universal reference when attempting to locate or consume
19 the goods or services.

20 In one embodiment, a computing device (such as a stationary or mobile
21 computing device) has access to one or more of the tree structures and can utilize
22 the tree structures to ascertain its current context. The device determines its
23 context by traversing one or more of the tree structures to ascertain information
24 that is associated with the individual nodes of the tree structure. In a particular
25 embodiment, the context is the device location and the device is capable of

1 autonomously determining its location within a Master World and one or more
2 Secondary worlds. Once the computing device has determined its location, it can
3 then take part in location-dependent scenarios.

4 In one embodiment a Master World is defined and is a hierarchical tree
5 structure that represents a universally acceptable description of the world. One or
6 more Secondary Worlds can be defined and constitute company- or organization-
7 specific views of the world that link with the Master World. A Secondary World
8 can describe the location tree of an organization.

9 In one embodiment, a device architecture includes a common interface, a
10 location service module, a plurality of location providers, and an application
11 program interface (API) or events layer. Various location providers can call the
12 common interface with location information that is processed by the location
13 service module to ascertain the device's current location. The location providers
14 provide hints about the current location and the location service module turns the
15 hints into a nodal location on one or more of the hierarchical tree structures. The
16 location service then traverses one or more of the tree structures to ascertain a
17 complete device location. Various applications can call the API layer to ascertain
18 location information from the location service module. By knowing where a
19 device is located within a hierarchical structure, the applications can present
20 location-dependent goods or services to the user. Thus, a user is able to actively
21 participate in their current computing environment.

22 In other embodiments, the location service module is able to determine, to a
23 degree of certainty, the location of the device. It does so through the use of
24 confidence and accuracy parameters that are assigned to the information that is
25 provided by the location providers. Additionally, a trust parameter can be

1 assigned by the location service module to the location providers and provides a
2 measure of the trust that is associated with a particular location provider. The
3 location service module can then consider all of the parameters in deciding which
4 location information to use and how to use it in determining a device location.

5 In another embodiment, privacy issues are addressed by a privacy manager
6 that functions to modulate the information that is provided to the various
7 applications as a function of the applications' identities and security policies on
8 the device.

9 In yet another embodiment, a unique beacon provider is described. A
10 beacon can be located in various places and transmits context information that (in
11 the case of location information) can be directly used to ascertain the device's
12 location relative to a tree structure node. This provides direct information about
13 the device's location within the defined hierarchical infrastructure.

14 **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

15
16 Fig. 1 is a diagram of an exemplary computing device that can be used in
17 accordance with the described embodiments.

18 Fig. 2 is a conceptual diagram of an exemplary Master World and an
19 exemplary Secondary World in accordance with the described embodiment.

20 Fig. 3 is an exemplary specific view of a Master World and a Secondary
21 World and their relation to one another.

22 Fig. 4 is a flow diagram that describes steps in a method in accordance with
23 the described embodiment.

24 Fig. 5 is a flow diagram that describes steps in a method in accordance with
25 the described embodiment.

Fig. 6 is a high level diagram of an exemplary computing device architecture.

Fig. 7 is a somewhat more specific view of an exemplary computing device architecture.

Fig. 8 is a flow diagram that describes steps in a method in accordance with the described embodiment.

Fig. 9 is a flow diagram that describes steps in a method in accordance with the described embodiment.

Fig. 10 is a flow diagram that describes steps in a method in accordance with the described embodiment.

Fig. 11 is a side elevational view of an exemplary location beacon in accordance with one embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Overview

To provide a standardized solution, embodiments described just below provide a uniform definition of the world. The uniform definition is defined in terms of a hierarchical tree of nodes, where each node represents some aspect of the world. Each node is connected to at least one other node by a branch. An exemplary classification of nodes takes place on a physical level (e.g. physical locations such as political entities, infrastructure entities and public places), as well as a non-physical level (e.g. military APOs). This hierarchical nodal structure is referred to as the Master World, and is a standardized view worldwide. Each node of the Master World has various attributes associated with it that assist in context-aware computing. Exemplary attributes include a unique ID, name,

1 geographic entity class, latitude/longitude, relative importance, contextual parents
2 to name just a few. The Master World is useful because it can be used to
3 determine the relative location of a place anywhere in the world and at any
4 definable granularity.

5 Once an individual's location or a place an individual is interested in is
6 determined, various services that reference the location can be offered to the
7 individual based on their location. That is, value is provided by the Master World
8 model in the ability to tie services to nodal locations in the Master World.

9 Building on this concept, two additional concepts add value—the concept
10 of so-called Secondary Worlds and a “geozone.”

11 A Secondary World is a powerful computing mechanism whereby
12 individual entities (such as businesses or organizations) can define their own
13 particular worlds that need not necessarily conform to the Master World view of
14 the world. That is, while the Master World is essentially a physical hierarchical
15 representation of the world, the Secondary Worlds can be physical and/or logical
16 representations of each individual entities' world view. One particularly useful
17 aspect of the Secondary World is that it links, at at least one point, into the Master
18 World. Thus, within any Secondary World, a user's location not only within the
19 Secondary World, but the Master World as well can be determined. Various
20 services can be attached to the nodes of the Secondary World. Based upon a user's
21 calculated position, these various services that are associated with Secondary
22 World nodes can be offered to the user. In addition, because the user's context is
23 determined relative to the Master World, other services that may not be associated
24 with a particular Secondary World can be offered.

1 A geozone is essentially a spatial indexing mechanism by which the Master
2 World is subdivided into individual zones. In the described embodiment, the
3 zones are subdivided through the use of a quadtree algorithm that is dependent on
4 a density function (although many other spatial index approaches can also be
5 used). Once a desired density level is achieved (density might be defined in terms
6 of points of interest per zone), each node on the Master World is assigned a
7 particular geozone. Geozones enable proximity calculations to be computed in a
8 fast and straight forward manner.

9 A useful aspect of the Master and Secondary Worlds are that they are
10 "reachable" from various computing devices such as stationary (i.e. desktop
11 devices) or mobile computing devices (i.e. cell phones, laptops etc.). That is, the
12 Master World (or at least a portion of it) and one or more Secondary Worlds can be
13 either locally maintained on the computing device, or accessed, e.g. via the Web or
14 some other mechanism, so that a user can derive their context. For example, the
15 Secondary World can be downloaded onto the computing device so that a user can
16 derive their context within the Secondary World. Once a user's context is
17 determined from the Master World and one or more Secondary Worlds, a various
18 robust collection of context-aware solutions become available to the user. For
19 example, specific Secondary World services can be offered or Master World
20 services can be offered. Additionally, services from other Secondary Worlds
21 might also be offered since the user's location may be known (or made known) to
22 these other Secondary Worlds. In this way, the Master World can link two or more
23 Secondary Worlds together.

24 Another aspect is that the described embodiments harness the computing
25 power of each computing device in determining the device's location. Here, by

1 virtue of having the Master World and one or more Secondary Worlds reachable
2 by the device (and possibly locally maintained on the device), the device itself
3 determines its own context.

4 One embodiment provides a client side device that is configured to utilize
5 the context-aware structures that are discussed above, i.e. the Master and one or
6 more Secondary Worlds. The Master World or a portion thereof can be locally
7 available on the device or can be accessible at another location, e.g. via the Web.
8 In this embodiment, the client device has a location service embodied thereon.
9 The described location service is a software module that can determine the
10 location of the device and can answer queries from various applications (either
11 executing on the device or off the device). The location service determines the
12 location of the device by using the Master World and one or more Secondary
13 Worlds. The applications query the location service through one or more
14 Application Program Interfaces (APIs) or Events to get location information that is
15 used by the applications to render a service.

16 The location service makes use of one or more location providers that
17 convey information to the device. This information can be information that is
18 specific to the location provider, or can be information that can be mapped directly
19 into a node of the Master World or Secondary Worlds. Exemplary location
20 providers can include Global Positioning Service (GPS) providers, cell phone
21 providers (cell providers), Bluetooth providers, a user interface provider and the
22 like. The location providers provide information that gives some aspect of a
23 device's current location. This information is used by the location service to
24 ascertain the location of the device.
25

One particularly advantageous feature of the client device is a standard or common location provider interface. The location provider interface enables the various location providers to provide information to the location service so that the location service can use the information to determine its location. Essentially, the multiple location provider interface is a common interface that enables multiple different location providers to provide location information (or hints) about location to a location service that is on a device. The location providers can provide the location information constantly, at intervals, or when polled by the device. The location information can be provided with confidence and accuracy estimates to enable the location service to evaluate the relative quality of the information before it is used. The various providers also have the ability to self-monitor themselves which assists in the providers' ability to intelligently convey information to the location service. By having a common interface, the collection of location providers is dynamically extensible—that is location providers can be added or removed from the collection of location providers without any interference of the functionality performed by the location service or device. The location providers can be added or removed while the device is operating. This is particularly useful in accommodating location providers that are developed in the future. In this particular embodiment, two levels of abstraction are provided i.e. (1) the provider interface that receives information from the location providers and (2) the API/events layer that enables applications to get at the various information.

One focus of this embodiment is a device that can collect context information (e.g. location information) from a variety of different sources, determine the device's current context from that information, and provide the current context at some level to one or more applications that can use the device's

1 context to render a service or enable the device to participate in its context
2 environment.

3 In the described embodiment, the device receives location information or
4 hints about its location. This information is collated and mapped by the location
5 service into a node in the Master World and/or Secondary World. The hierarchical
6 trees can then be traversed to determine the device's accurate location in both the
7 Secondary World and the Master World. At this point, the device has determined
8 its context. The information that is collected can be subject to arbitration to ensure
9 that only highly trusted information is used to determine context. The location
10 information can be cached to provide "current location information" which, for a
11 definable period of time will be accurate to some degree. Thus, if for some reason
12 other location providers are unavailable, the cache can be used to ascertain
13 location.

14 Once a device's location is determined, the device can apply a security
15 policy to the information. Once this is done, the device can begin to answer
16 queries from various applications.

17 One aspect of the described embodiment is a "favorite locations" aspect in
18 which the device can be automatically configured, when it determines its context,
19 so that it can adjust to the different locations.

20 Further, various types of location providers can convey different types of
21 information. For example, a so-called "thin provider" provides location
22 information that is translated by the location service into the appropriate node
23 information. A so-called "thick provider" includes logic that takes location
24 information and provides it in a form that can map directly into the Master World
25 or Secondary World.

1 In another embodiment location translation services are provided that are
2 directed to determining, as accurately as possible, the context or location of the
3 device. In this embodiment, information is received from the various location
4 providers. This information includes location, accuracy and confidence (all of
5 which are provided by the location provider), trust (which is assigned to a location
6 provider by the device or a user) and a timestamp (which helps to age the location
7 information). The location translation processing involves determining which of
8 the location providers are valid and active. The location providers can be ranked
9 in accordance with the confidence and trust levels. This defines an ordered list of
10 location providers. Provision is made for a situation in which all of the location
11 providers may go inactive. If so, a "current location" is used as a location
12 provider whose confidence decreases over time.

13 In the event that information from two or more of the location providers
14 conflicts, then measures can be taken to use information for which there is a
15 higher level of trust. The information that is provided by all of the location
16 providers (assuming no conflict) can then be used to determine a tree structure and
17 a node's entity ID (EID). The tree might be the Master World and the EID is a
18 node on the Master World. The tree might also be a Secondary World and the EID
19 (or location unique identifier or "LUID") is a node on the Secondary World. Once
20 this information is collected, complete location information can be determined by
21 simply traversing the tree(s). Once a device's location is determined, a cache can
22 be updated with the current location (including a time stamp).

23 In another embodiment, privacy issues in the context-aware computing
24 environment are addressed. In this embodiment, the location service has acquired
25 location information that pertains to the location of a particular device. A privacy

1 manager determines what level of information to provide to applications that
2 might request the information. The privacy manager can reside on the computing
3 device itself, or can be proxied by a trusted third party.

4 According to this embodiment, a scale of privacy levels are defined. Each
5 level is defined to include more or less specific information about the location of a
6 particular device. A user is able to assign a privacy level to entities that might
7 request location information. Additionally, each node of the Master World and a
8 Secondary World can have a privacy level associated with it. When a query from
9 an application is received, the privacy manager first determines who the query is
10 from and the privacy level associated with the application or entity. The privacy
11 manager then evaluates one or more of the Master World and the Secondary World
12 to find a node that has a corresponding privacy level. When a corresponding node
13 is found, information at that particular granularity is provided to the requesting
14 application or entity.

15 In another embodiment systems and methods of providing a location
16 provider in the form of a location beacon are described. In this embodiment, a
17 location beacon is provided that can be mounted in various areas (public/private
18 areas) to beacon the location to any computing devices within transmission range.
19 The information that is transmitted enables a device to determine its location or
20 context. The location beacon can transmit information that is specific to the
21 location service that uses the information. Transmitted information can include an
22 EID/URL pair, and a LUID/URL pair. The EID gives the node identification of a
23 node in the Master World; and, the associated URL gives a protocol to
24 communicate with the Master World. The URL might, for instance, link to a
25 server that can provide additional context information that uses the EID. The

1 LUID indicates a node on a Secondary World that corresponds to a current
2 location; and the URL gives a protocol to communicate with the Secondary World.
3 For example, the URL can link with a server that is hosting the Secondary World.
4 This server can then be queried to discover more information about the Secondary
5 World (i.e. Secondary World tree structure, location of associated resources, etc.)
6 With the EID and LUID (along with the URLs), a device can now traverse the
7 Master World or Secondary World to determine its location. Various technologies
8 can be used to implement the beacon (wireless, RF, IR). The beacon can be a
9 “program once” device to deter tampering. Programmable beacons can, however,
10 be provided. Security can also be provided in the form of a verifiable signature
11 that is provided with the beacon information to assure the veracity of the
12 transmitted information.

13 A useful context-aware computing aspect of the beacon is the concept of
14 “location-enabled access”. That is, in addition to (or separately from) receiving
15 location information, a beacon can transmit code download pointers that enable
16 smart devices to access software code that allows the device to participate in its
17 current context.

18 19 **Exemplary Computing System**

20 In the context of this document, the term “computing device” is used to
21 refer generally to any type of computing device. Characteristics of exemplary
22 computing devices are that they typically include one or more processors,
23 computer-readable media (such as storage devices and memory), and software
24 executing on the one or more processors that cause the processors to implement a
25 programmed functionality. In particular embodiments, implementation takes place

1 in the context of mobile computing devices (e.g. laptop computers and the like),
2 and/or hand-held computing devices (e.g. palm PCs, wireless telephones and the
3 like).

4 Fig. 1 is a schematic diagram that constitutes but one example of a
5 computing device that is suitable for use in connection with the described
6 embodiments. It is to be understood that portions of the illustrated computing
7 device can be incorporated in one or more of the computing devices (e.g. palm
8 PCs, wireless telephones, etc.) with which particular embodiments are envisioned
9 for use.

10 Computer 130 includes one or more processors or processing units 132, a
11 system memory 134, and a bus 136 that couples various system components
12 including the system memory 134 to processors 132. The bus 136 represents one
13 or more of any of several types of bus structures, including a memory bus or
14 memory controller, a peripheral bus, an accelerated graphics port, and a processor
15 or local bus using any of a variety of bus architectures. The system memory 134
16 includes read only memory (ROM) 138 and random access memory (RAM) 140.
17 A basic input/output system (BIOS) 142, containing the basic routines that help to
18 transfer information between elements within computer 130, such as during start-
19 up, is stored in ROM 138.

20 Computer 130 further includes a hard disk drive 144 for reading from and
21 writing to a hard disk (not shown), a magnetic disk drive 146 for reading from and
22 writing to a removable magnetic disk 148, and an optical disk drive 150 for
23 reading from or writing to a removable optical disk 152 such as a CD ROM or
24 other optical media. The hard disk drive 144, magnetic disk drive 146, and optical
25 disk drive 150 are connected to the bus 136 by an SCSI interface 154 or some

1 other appropriate interface. The drives and their associated computer-readable
2 media provide nonvolatile storage of computer-readable instructions, data
3 structures, program modules and other data for computer 130. Although the
4 exemplary environment described herein employs a hard disk, a removable
5 magnetic disk 148 and a removable optical disk 152, it should be appreciated by
6 those skilled in the art that other types of computer-readable media which can
7 store data that is accessible by a computer, such as magnetic cassettes, flash
8 memory cards, digital video disks, random access memories (RAMs), read only
9 memories (ROMs), and the like, may also be used in the exemplary operating
10 environment.

11 A number of program modules may be stored on the hard disk 144,
12 magnetic disk 148, optical disk 152, ROM 138, or RAM 140, including an
13 operating system 158, one or more application programs 160, other program
14 modules 162, and program data 164. A user may enter commands and
15 information into computer 130 through input devices such as a keyboard 166 and a
16 pointing device 168. Other input devices (not shown) may include a microphone,
17 joystick, game pad, satellite dish, scanner, or the like. These and other input
18 devices are connected to the processing unit 132 through an interface 170 that is
19 coupled to the bus 136. A monitor 172 or other type of display device is also
20 connected to the bus 136 via an interface, such as a video adapter 174. In addition
21 to the monitor, personal computers typically include other peripheral output
22 devices (not shown) such as speakers and printers.

23 Computer 130 commonly operates in a networked environment using
24 logical connections to one or more remote computers, such as a remote computer
25 176. The remote computer 176 may be another personal computer, a server, a

1 router, a network PC, a peer device or other common network node, and typically
2 includes many or all of the elements described above relative to computer 130,
3 although only a memory storage device 178 has been illustrated in Fig. 1. The
4 logical connections depicted in Fig. 1 include a local area network (LAN) 180 and
5 a wide area network (WAN) 182. Such networking environments are
6 commonplace in offices, enterprise-wide computer networks, intranets, and the
7 Internet.

8 When used in a LAN networking environment, computer 130 is connected
9 to the local network 180 through a network interface or adapter 184. When used
10 in a WAN networking environment, computer 130 typically includes a modem 186
11 or other means for establishing communications over the wide area network 182,
12 such as the Internet. The modem 186, which may be internal or external, is
13 connected to the bus 136 via a serial port interface 156. In a networked
14 environment, program modules depicted relative to the personal computer 130, or
15 portions thereof, may be stored in the remote memory storage device. It will be
16 appreciated that the network connections shown are exemplary and other means of
17 establishing a communications link between the computers may be used.

18 Generally, the data processors of computer 130 are programmed by means
19 of instructions stored at different times in the various computer-readable storage
20 media of the computer. Programs and operating systems are typically distributed,
21 for example, on floppy disks or CD-ROMs. From there, they are installed or
22 loaded into the secondary memory of a computer. At execution, they are loaded at
23 least partially into the computer's primary electronic memory. The invention
24 described herein includes these and other various types of computer-readable
25 storage media when such media contain instructions or programs for implementing

1 the steps described below in conjunction with a microprocessor or other data
2 processor. The invention also includes the computer itself when programmed
3 according to the methods and techniques described below.

4 For purposes of illustration, programs and other executable program
5 components such as the operating system are illustrated herein as discrete blocks,
6 although it is recognized that such programs and components reside at various
7 times in different storage components of the computer, and are executed by the
8 data processor(s) of the computer.

9 10 **Defining the World**

11 One of the problems to date with attempting to solve the context-aware
12 computing problem is that every proposed solution has its own approach, data
13 structures, processes and the like. There is little if any standardization between the
14 various approaches. In the described embodiment, standardization is achieved at
15 the foundational level by defining a universal view of the Earth. That is, a
16 universally acceptable definition of the Earth is proposed and is useable in various
17 computing scenarios to enable context-dependent computing. In this document, a
18 specific example of context-dependent computing is given in the form of location
19 dependent computing. It is to be understood that this constitutes but one example
20 of a context in which the various embodiments discussed below can be employed.
21 Other "contexts" can include, any information that can fit into a hierarchical
22 structure including, without limitation, role/personnel in an organization, device
23 categorizations, current activity, current environment, active devices and the like.

24 25 **The Master World**

1 A Master World is defined as a politically correct and publicly accepted
2 hierarchical tree structure that catalogs physical location or geographic divisions
3 of the Earth. The Master World is defined in such a way that many different
4 classes of political, administrative and geographic entities across the entire Earth
5 are included. Areas of political contention are accounted for by presenting a view
6 of the world based on the language/locale of the computing device.

7 Fig. 2 shows an exemplary hierarchical tree structure 200 that represents a
8 portion of the Master World. The Master World contains multiple nodes 202, with
9 each node representing some type of geographic division (e.g. political or natural
10 entity) of the Earth. In the illustrated example, the nodes of the Master World are
11 arranged in the following groups: (1) political or natural entities (e.g. continents,
12 countries, oceans, states, counties, cities and the like); (2) infrastructure entities
13 (e.g. postal codes, area codes, time zones and the like); (3) public place entities
14 (e.g. parks, malls, airports, stadiums, and the like); and (4) non-physical entities
15 (military postal code regions, vacation regions, affiliate coverage areas of
16 television networks that can be geographically discontinuous, and the like).

17 In the Fig. 2 example, the top node of the tree structure represents the
18 Earth. Each node underneath the top node represents a geographical division of
19 the Earth. In this example, none of the nodes have an association with any
20 businesses or services. That is, there is a distinction between node entities that are
21 part of the Master World and non-geographic places where activities take place.
22 Though the Master World includes nodes for public places (i.e. airports, malls,
23 etc), it does not include individual listings of businesses or service providers.
24 Each node is uniquely identified by an ID (EID or entity ID). In addition to the
25

1 unique EIDs, a URL is associated with the tree structure and provides a context for
2 the tree structure as will become apparent below.

3 As an example, consider the following: Seattle-Tacoma International
4 Airport (SeaTac) will be included in the Master World, but references to individual
5 airline business locations at SeaTac might be “leaves” on the tree that are tagged
6 by the SeaTac Airport EID (see “Secondary World” section and the Table below).
7 Similarly, the Seattle Center might be a node on the Master World, while the
8 Seattle Arts Festival, Bumpershoot, the Seattle Sonics NBA Team, and the Seattle
9 Center Starbucks Coffee Shop might be tagged with the Seattle Center EID. As
10 another example, the Master World also contains nodes for all Interstate
11 (motorway) exits. For example, the I-90, Exit 109, Washington is a node in the
12 Master World. The Best Western Inn located at 1700 Canyon Road in Ellensburg,
13 Washington might be tagged with the EID of this Exit.

14 Thus, the Master World provides a uniform way of defining locations. The
15 uniform location definitions can then be universally used to assign attributes to
16 goods or services. Whenever a computing device determines its location to
17 correspond to a particular uniform location definition, it can take advantage of the
18 location-dependent goods or services that share the uniform location definition.
19 The Master World is useful because it is a standardized view of the world. Its
20 accurate standardized geographic dimension attribution can be easily accessed by
21 both providers and consumers. Services and product providers (or third parties
22 such as search engines, network and yellow-page database directories) can use the
23 nodes of the Master World by assigning a standardized persistent geographic
24 reference to all commerce locations or points of interest. These commerce
25 locations or points of interest can be considered as “leaves” on the tree structure.

In the illustrated example, the nodes of the Master World have one or more attributes that facilitate its use. Exemplary attributes are described in the table immediately below:

Attribute	Description
Entity ID (EID)	The EID is a unique ID for each node. No two nodes have the same EID.
Name	The name is defined in terms of the neutral ground truth (NGT) name. The NGT name supports various language translations for entity names as appropriate (e.g. Pacific Ocean, Pazifischer Ozean, Oceano Pacifico, etc.)
Geographical Entity Class (GEC)	The GEC is a geographical classification of each node. An exemplary GEC is discussed below in the "Geozone" section.
Latitude	The horizontal coordinate position on the globe (i.e. the coordinate position of the node's centroid)
Longitude	The vertical coordinate position on the globe (i.e. the coordinate position of the node's centroid)
Relative Importance	The geographic importance of an entity in reference to other entities in the same region. Value from 1 to 256 (e.g. New York City = 3, Los Angeles = 4, and Omaha = 5 even though Omaha is much smaller but almost as important in relation to surrounding populated places)
Contextual Parent(s)	The parents of the parent/child relationship for each node. Multiple parents are supported (e.g. Redmond is a child of King County, Area Code 425, the Pacific Time Zone, and the MSNBC affiliate KING TV).
Source	The source of origin for the record (e.g. Microsoft or a specified data vendor)
Start Date	Date when the node information was first valid
End Date	Date when the node information was last valid (retired zip codes, breakup of countries)
Modification Date	Records date changes that are made to the record relating to retirement or updates to any fields
Status	Active, lashed (links duplicate nodes together), pending or retired

The attributes listed above constitute exemplary attributes only. Other attributes that are different from and/or additional to those referenced above could be used. A few exemplary entity or node records that employ the above attributes are shown below:

Entity ID (EID)	24948
Name	Pacific Ocean, Pazifischer Ozean, Oceano Pacifico, etc.
Geographical Entity Class	138/Ocean

(GEC)	
Latitude	0 (+000° 00' 00")
Longitude	-170 (-170° 00' 00")
Relative Importance	1
Contextual Parent(s)	World
Source	MSFT GeoUnit
Start Date	0/0/00
End Date	0/0/00
Modification Date	01/18/00
Status	Active

Entity (EID)	ID	27490
Name		Redmond
Geographical Entity Class (GEC)		78/non-capital town
Latitude		47.6768303 (+047° 40' 36")
Longitude		-122.1099625 (-122° 06' 35")
Relative Importance		107
Contextual Parent(s)		1. King, second level [Washington, United States] 2. Puget Sound-Seattle, travel region [Washington, United States]
Source		MSFT GeoUnit
Start Date		0/0/00
End Date		0/0/00
Modification Date		01/18/00
Status		Active

The Master World also serves as a repository of common denominator links between itself and various "Secondary Worlds" and as a conduit that connects Secondary Worlds to other Secondary Worlds. Content, service and device providers can use the Master World to associate their publicly available offerings with a geographic location and the corresponding multiple branch hierarchical

1 structure. This location will be associated with a single entity within the tree
2 structure thereby allowing geographic and time/distance calculations and the
3 necessary parent/child relationship navigation.

4 5 **The Master World Index (Geozones)**

6 By definition, the Master World provides a hierarchical structure of entities
7 (nodes) that cover the entire globe. Upward navigation within the hierarchy is
8 quite natural. Efficient navigation downward requires geographic proximity
9 awareness. Additionally, there are possible scenarios that will require jumping
10 from branch to branch in order to successfully return values in a query, or for more
11 accurate calculations of distances to close “leaves” attached to nodes other than
12 the original source node. The Master World makes use of an index scheme that
13 can identify peer level nodes by virtue of the geographical proximity. This
14 indexing scheme makes use of a quad tree algorithm to define so-called
15 “geozones.”

16 A quadtree is essentially a spatial index that breaks coverage into
17 homogeneous cells of regularly decreasing size. Each quadrant of the tree has up
18 to four children. The quadtree segmentation process can continue until the entire
19 map is partitioned based on many different end result criteria including the density
20 of the number of items (e.g. points of interest) in each quad. The approach
21 provides a form of spatial index that accelerates spatial selection and content
22 identification.

23 To complete the spatial indexing scheme to provide each node with a
24 defined geozone, a quadtree algorithm is applied to the nodes and can be based
25 upon a desired density of, for example, points of interest that are to occur in any

1 one zone. Once all of the zones have been defined, each zone is given a unique ID
2 (e.g. top/left and bottom/right Latitude and Longitude pairs). Each of the nodes of
3 the Master World is then assigned a zone in which it is located. Quadtree
4 algorithms are known and will be appreciated by those of skill in the art.

6 **The Master World Location**

7 As can be appreciated, having a uniform standardized representation of the
8 world in the form of a hierarchical traversable tree structure can greatly facilitate
9 the manner to which context-dependent, and more specifically, location-dependent
10 goods and services can be linked.

11 In the described embodiment, a computing device has access to at least a
12 portion of the Master World. For example, the computing device can have the
13 Master World saved in an internal storage device, it can comprise part of the
14 computing device's operating system, or the device might access the Master World
15 via a network medium such as the Internet. With the Master World tree structure
16 being accessible to each computing device, each device has the power to
17 determine its own context or node-referenced location. That is, the computing
18 device can determine, through software it is executing, its particular location, i.e.
19 node. Once the computing device determines an associated node, it can simply
20 traverse the tree to ascertain its complete location.

21 For example, if a computing device determines that it is currently located at
22 a node that corresponds to the City of Redmond, it can traverse the Master World
23 tree structure to ascertain that it is in the State of Washington, Country of The
24 United States, on the continent of North America. By ascertaining its precise
25 location, the computing device (or its user) is now in a position to take advantage

of location-dependent services that might be offered. This particular model is a tremendous improvement over current models that utilize a central server to ascertain location for a number of different devices. In that model, each device (or user) provides information about its location (e.g. perhaps the user enters the zip code or city that the device is currently in) and might enter a query to find, for example, a McDonald's restaurant in his zip code. The server then takes this information and might, for example, tell the user about the location of all of the McDonald's restaurants within that zip code or city. If the servers fails in this model, then none of the computing devices can take advantage of its services. In the present model, each computing device is self-sustaining. Each can determine its own location, and accordingly, each device can take advantage of location-dependent services. For example, if the computing device understands that it is located on a particular node of the Master World, then it can execute queries to find a McDonald's that has an EID that corresponds to the particular node in which the computing device is located. Particular robustness is provided through the use of the above-described geo-zones. The geo-zones enable proximate geographic divisions to be quickly searched in an efficient manner. For example, if an individual is looking for the nearest Kinko's to make copies and none are located in the geo-zone that corresponds to the node in which the computing device is located, then adjacent geo-zones can be quickly searched.

Secondary Worlds

In the described embodiment, the concept of a Secondary World is used to provide support for additional context. A secondary world might be defined by a third party organization or company and contains nodes that comprise physical

1 and/or logical entities that are unique to that organization. The nodes of the
2 Secondary World may or may not have much context outside of the particular
3 organization that defined the Secondary World, since a secondary world could be
4 made either public or private. The Secondary Worlds do not duplicate the Master
5 World, but rather supplement it in a unique, organization specific manner. While
6 the Master World is defined to be a widely accepted standard, each Secondary
7 World can be a widely variant representation of an organization's proprietary view
8 of the world. In the described embodiment, each Secondary World has at least one
9 node that is linked with a node of the Master World. This gives the Secondary
10 World a context or location in the Master World. Also note that in some context
11 applications, several secondary worlds may be accessed, each providing additional
12 context specific pieces of location data.

13 Fig. 2 shows an exemplary Secondary World 204 that comprises a plurality
14 of nodes 206. Each of the nodes 206 constitutes a physical or logical entity. For
15 example, the nodes can constitute a company, its divisions, regions campuses,
16 buildings, floors in various buildings and rooms on various floors. At least one of
17 the nodes is linked with a node of the Master World. The nodes of the Secondary
18 World can have the same attributes as the nodes of the Master World.

19 As an example of a Secondary World, consider that Boeing might define a
20 Secondary World that includes a list of entities that are important to its employees.
21 The root entity would be "Boeing Corp." and its children might be company
22 divisions (St. Louis Military Division, Everett Plant, Corporate HQ, etc.). Further
23 down the tree structure, individual nodes might be defined to represent individual
24 buildings (Hanger 12), offices within this building (Office 1001), building areas
25 (Southwestern quadrant of hanger 12), etc. Each entity or node has a unique

1 identifier (Local Unique ID or “LUID”) and a URL that is associated with the tree
2 on which the node occurs. The URL uniquely identifies the Secondary World tree
3 structure so that a user within that world can determine how to interact with the
4 world. This aspect is discussed below in more detail. Boeing can then use the
5 LUIDs to associate equipment, services, departments or even personnel to a
6 physical or logical location.

7 As a more concrete example, consider Fig. 3 which shows an exemplary
8 portion of the Master World 300 and a Secondary World 302. Master World 300
9 includes the following nodes: World, United States, Washington, Redmond, and
10 Zip = 98052. The exemplary Secondary World 302 is a hierarchical tree structure
11 that has been defined by Microsoft Corporation and includes the following nodes:
12 Microsoft, Redmond Campus, 1 Microsoft Way, Building 26, 3rd floor, Conference
13 Room 3173, Building 24, 2nd floor, Conference Room 1342. In this example, the
14 Secondary World 302 “touch points” into the Master World from the Redmond
15 node. In this example, a video projector is shown as being associated with the
16 node “Conference room 1342”. Here, the video projector is not a node in the
17 secondary world. Rather, the video projector is an item in some other resource
18 discovery service (e.g. the active directory) and includes a location attribute that is
19 a pointer to “Conference room 1342.” There may be times, however, when nodes
20 can be created in the worlds to represent the location of key services—the node
21 themselves, however, would not represent the services.

22 Like the Master World, the Secondary World is advantageously accessible
23 to a user’s computing device. It could, for example, be downloaded—completely
24 or partially--and stored on a storage device and accessed when needed. It might
25 be downloaded for a one time use only. The Secondary World enables the

1 computing device to ascertain its context within the Secondary World. In this
2 example, the computing device would, by using the Secondary World, compute its
3 location within the Secondary World. The computing device can do this by
4 traversing the tree structure from the node in which it is currently located to the
5 root node. This would, for example, give the computing device (and hence the
6 user) a complete Secondary World context. Once the Secondary World location is
7 known, the user is in a position to take advantage of goods or services that are
8 associated with the nodes of the Secondary World. That is, once the computing
9 device determines its Secondary World context, it is ready to become an active
10 participant in the Secondary World.

11 Tremendous value can be achieved by associating goods or services with
12 the individual nodes of the Secondary World. For example, Conference Room
13 1342 has a video projector associated with it. That is, the location of the video
14 projector is in Conference Room 1342. Assume that an individual in Conference
15 Room 3173 has a presentation that requires the use of the video projector such as
16 the one located in Conference Room 1342. Normally, an individual would have
17 no way of ascertaining the location of the video projector other than perhaps
18 physically calling over to the building to check whether there is a video projector
19 available. In this example, because the user's computing device is able to
20 ascertain its location within the Secondary World, it is able to locate the video
21 projector in Conference Room 1342. It would do this by simply executing
22 software that traverses the Secondary World tree structure to find the resource of
23 interest.

24 Note also that because there is a link into the Master World, the computing
25 device is able to derive its context (location) within both worlds. This enables the

1 computing device, and hence the user, to take advantage of goods and services that
2 are associated with the Secondary World, as well as participate in location-
3 dependent services that are consumable based upon the user's location in the
4 Master World.

5 Fig. 4 is a flow diagram that describes steps in a method in accordance with
6 the described embodiment. The steps described just below are implemented by a
7 computing device which, in the illustrated example, is a hand-held mobile
8 computing device.

9 Step 400 accesses first and second hierarchical tree structures that are
10 resident on a computer-readable media. In this example, the tree structures might
11 be stored on the device or might be accessible via a network such as the Internet.
12 An exemplary first tree structure is the Master World and an exemplary second
13 tree structure is a Secondary World. Alternately, the tree structures could both be
14 Secondary Worlds. Once the tree structures have been accessed by the device,
15 step 402 traverses multiple nodes of the tree structures to derive the context of the
16 computing device. In this example, the computing device receives information
17 that informs it as to its location at a node of one of the trees. This information can
18 come to the computing device in any suitable way, e.g. a user can enter the
19 information through a User Interface (UI) or the location might be broadcast to the
20 computing device by another computing device (e.g. through the use of Bluetooth
21 technology or Universal Plug and Play (UpnP). Specific examples of how this
22 information can be conveyed to the computing device are given below in more
23 detail. Regardless of how this information is conveyed to the computing device,
24 once the computing device has the information, it executes software that traverses
25

1 one or both of the tree structures to derive its context which, in this example, is the
2 device's location.

4 **Defining Secondary Worlds**

5 As was mentioned above, one particularly valuable aspect of the described
6 embodiment is that individual organizations can define their own Secondary
7 Worlds. This gives the organization a great deal of flexibility in providing goods
8 and services and, more broadly, increasing the efficiency of their organization. In
9 one embodiment, a software tool is provided that enables individual organizations
10 to define and maintain their own Secondary Worlds.

11 In one embodiment, each secondary world can be uniquely identified as a
12 name space (e.g. an XML namespace). This ensures that any overlap in names
13 between the Secondary World and the Master World will not result in a collision.
14 As an example, consider the following: the Master World might contain an entity
15 identified as "Chicago" referring the city. A Secondary World that is established
16 by the National Basketball Association (NBA) and a different Secondary World
17 that is established by the Caterpillar Corporation might also have entities named
18 "Chicago" that refer to completely different entities than the Master World's
19 "Chicago." For example, the NBA's "Chicago" might refer to an NBA market
20 area while Caterpillar's "Chicago" might refer to a sales district. Having the
21 namespace separation between the Master and Secondary Worlds can ensure that
22 there not a collision between identically named entities because each name space
23 is uniquely different from every other namespace.

1 Fig. 5 is a flow diagram that describes steps in a method of building a
2 context-aware data structure. These steps are implemented by a software tool that
3 is executing on a computing device.

4 Step 500 receives input from a source that specifies information that
5 pertains to physical and/or logical entities. In this example, a system administrator
6 might physically enter information about the structure of the Secondary World that
7 they desire to define. This information can include information about buildings,
8 divisions, conference rooms and the like. Step 502 then processes the information
9 to define a hierarchical tree structure that has a context. In this example, the
10 context is location. It will be appreciated, however, that other contexts could be
11 employed. Each of the nodes in the hierarchical tree structure represents a
12 separate physical or logical entity. Step 504 then links at least one of the nodes of
13 the hierarchical tree structure with another tree structure having a context. In this
14 example, this other tree structure can comprise the Master World. Once the tree
15 structures have been built and linked, they are ready for traversal in a manner that
16 enables context to be derived from one or more of the nodes.

17 18 **Location as a Service**

19 In the above examples, the computing device is able to determine its own
20 location. In the embodiment about to be described, the computing device
21 determines its location by using location information that is provided to it from a
22 number of different sources of information. The device is able to take the
23 information that is provided to it and process the information to determine a
24 particular node on one or more hierarchical trees. Once the device has done this, it
25 can determine its complete location which is a useful thing to know particularly

1 when there are location-dependent services that can be consumed by the device's
2 user.

3 Fig. 6 shows a high level diagram of an exemplary computing device 600
4 that comprises, among other components, a context service module 602 and one or
5 more context providers 604. The context service module 602 can be implemented
6 in any suitable hardware, software, firmware or combination thereof. In this
7 particular example, the context service module is implemented in software that is
8 executed by one or more device processors. The context service module 602
9 receives context information from one or more context providers 604 and
10 processes the information to determine a current device context. In this particular
11 example, the device context is the device's location. Accordingly, the context
12 providers are location providers that provide location information, in various
13 forms, to the context service module 602 for processing. The location providers
14 604 receive information from various sources of context information (location
15 information) 606.

16 In the context of this document, a context provider comprises a software
17 component that can either be implemented on the device or off the device. The
18 context provider can also include any suitable hardware, firmware or combination
19 thereof. The role of the context providers are to receive information from sources
20 606 and convey the information to the context service module 602 so that the
21 context service module can use the information to determine a current device
22 context.

23 In the case where the context of the device is the device's location, sources
24 606 provide various information to the location providers 604 that pertains to the
25 device's current location. As an example, the sources of the information can

1 include various information transmitters such as a GPS system, cell phone or cell
2 ID, wireless transmitters that transmit location information, location beacons,
3 802.11 transmitters and various other sources of information. The sources of
4 information can also include other computing devices that might, for example,
5 provide location information through Bluetooth technology. In addition, a source
6 of information 606 might include a person who, for example, physically enters
7 location information into the device 600 so that the device can process the
8 information to determine its location.

9 When the device 600 receives the location information from the sources
10 606, it processes the information with the location providers 604 and provides the
11 information to the location service module 602. The location service module 602
12 processes the location information and determines a particular node on one or
13 more of the hierarchical tree structures to which it has access which corresponds to
14 its current location. The location service module 602 can then traverse the tree
15 structures to determine a complete location for the device. Once the complete
16 location is determined, the device 600 can begin to interact with one or more
17 applications 608 that can query the device about its particular location so that one
18 or more location-dependent services can be rendered to the device. In this
19 example, the applications 608 are illustrated as being separate from the device. It
20 is to be understood, however, that the applications could be executing on the
21 device, e.g. a browser application.

22 As shown, the applications 608 can make calls to the device to ask the
23 device where it is located. The device is configured to receive the calls and
24 respond in an appropriate manner to the application. Once the application has the
25

1 device's location information, it can then render location specific services to the
2 device.

3 **Consider the following example:** You are a traveler and have a hand-held
4 mobile computing device that contains a Master World tree and a Secondary
5 World tree for SeaTac International Airport. You are scheduled to depart on a
6 plane for China from Concourse C. SeaTac International Airport has designed its
7 Secondary World to have the following nodes: "Arrivals", "Departures",
8 "Concourses", "Airlines", "Gates assigned to Airlines", and "Gate Location".
9 When you arrive at the airport, as you enter the airport your computing device
10 receives location information from different sources and with that information
11 your device determines that your location is in the Arrivals node. SeaTac
12 International has bank of servers that are executing applications to assist you while
13 you are in the airport. There are applications that can help you find services,
14 locate facilities (e.g. coffee shops, restaurants), give directions (e.g. how to get to
15 your departure gate), update you on the status of your flight, and even check you
16 in automatically for your flight. Consider also that as you walk through the airport
17 your location changes. Your computing device, however, can receive continuous
18 location information updates so that it can continue to determine its location as
19 you move through the airport. At one point, as you pass a Starbucks coffee shop,
20 your hand held device notifies you that if you purchase a latte at Starbucks and
21 present your hand held device, you will receive a 50 cent discount on your latte.
22 In this example, the utility of the Secondary World is demonstrated. By knowing
23 where its particular customers are in its facility, SeaTac International is able to
24 provide a host of services that were not possible before.

1 Assume further that you are in the airport and your flight is canceled. You
2 must find a place to stay for the night. Accordingly, you wish to determine the
3 closest Double Tree hotel because you really like the warm chocolate chip cookies
4 they give you when you check in. You execute a search engine on your computing
5 device to find the nearest Double Tree hotel. The search engine application first
6 determines your current location in the Master World as indicated by the EID of
7 the Master World node that corresponds to your location. Executing a search, the
8 search engine application looks for a Double Tree hotel that has an attribute that
9 includes an EID that matches your EID. If it finds one, it simply indicates for you
10 the result. If it does not find one with the corresponding EID, it can use an
11 adjacent geozone to search for a Double Tree hotel. It may also provide driving
12 directions to the hotel. The search engine application was able to do this because
13 it was able to ascertain your location in the Master World. It did this quickly and
14 automatically with little or no effort from you.

15 Consider further that as you are driving from the airport to the hotel you
16 decide that you want to find the nearest Kinko's so that you can print 100 copies of
17 a presentation that you are to give in the morning. Consider that your hand-held
18 computing device is a cellular phone and that Sprint is the carrier. Sprint has
19 defined its own Secondary World that might, for example, be designated in terms
20 of cell nets. By virtue of having Sprint's Secondary World on your computing
21 device, you are able to ascertain your location in Sprint's Secondary World and,
22 accordingly, your location in the Master World. Consider that Kinko's also has a
23 Secondary World that links with the Master World. By executing a search
24 application on your device, you are able to ascertain the location of the nearest
25 Kinko's as well as driving directions thereto. All of this is possible because your

1 device has access to the Master World and one or more Secondary Worlds. In this
2 example, the Master World provides a mechanism to daisy chain two or more
3 Secondary Worlds together. This is possible because the Secondary Worlds have
4 at least one reference or link into the Master World.

6 **Exemplary Device Architecture**

7 Fig. 7 shows computing device 600 in somewhat more detail. In this
8 particular embodiment, device 600 comprises an architecture that includes the
9 following components: a location service module 602, a location provider
10 interface 700, an application program interface (API)/Events module 702, a
11 privacy manager 704 a location conversion module 706, one or more applications
12 608 and one or more location providers 606. Also included in the architecture is
13 an active directory 708, Web service 710, location database 712, and personal
14 places 714. The architecture can be implemented in any suitable hardware,
15 software, firmware or combination thereof. The architecture mentioned above is
16 advantageous in that it enables each computing device to determine its own
17 context or location.

19 **Common Location Provider Interface**

20 One particularly advantageous aspect of the described embodiment is that it
21 employs a common interface 700 that provides a standard interface through which
22 the location providers 606 communicate. By having a common interface, the
23 location providers are extensible (to support future providers) in that they can be
24 dynamically added or removed from the collection of location providers. All that
25

1 is required of a particular location provider 606 is that it be written to support the
2 common interface.

3 In this example, there are several location providers 606. These location
4 providers provide location information in different forms. For example, a GPS
5 location provider might provide location information that is GPS specific.
6 Similarly, an IP/Subnet location provider might provide information that is
7 specific to an Internet Protocol. A mobile phone location provider might provide
8 location information in the form of a cell ID. In addition, a location User
9 Interface (UI) might provide location information in the form of a user entry that
10 specifies a city, street or building. All of the location information that is provided
11 by the various location providers is processed by the location service module 602
12 so that a current device location can be determined. To determine the current
13 device location, the location service module 602 may have to consult with an
14 active directory 708, a Web service 710, or a location database 712. In the
15 illustrated example, the active directory 708 might, for example, maintain a
16 secondary world and other networking metadata such as subnet and "site"
17 information that can help determine location based on networking connectivity.
18 Web service 710 can hold the master or secondary worlds, the attributes of which
19 can be used to find location. For example, if a cell phone knows its cell tower ID,
20 then the location provider can query the secondary world to ascertain the nodes
21 that match that cell tower ID. Location database 712 is basically a version of the
22 web service that is hosted or cached locally.

Location Providers

As indicate above, the architecture contemplates multiple different location providers that can provide location information to the location service module 602. This information can come in many different forms and quality levels. The information is then processed by the location service module 602 to determine a current device location. To do this, the service module 602 ascertains from the location information a particular node ID (EID and/or LUID) and a URL that is associated with the tree structure with which the node is associated. Once the location service module ascertains a node ID, it can then query the tree structure (or more accurately a server that manages the tree structure) using the URL to ascertain more information about the tree structure. For example, if the location service module 602 ascertains a LUID from a particular Secondary World, it might then query an active directory 708 (or an Intranet server—which is another location database) to discover the parents and the children of the node. This would then enable the location service module to build the Secondary World.

The location providers 606 can provide the location information to the location service module 602 in many different ways. For example, some location providers 606 may continuously provide information (e.g. the GPS provider may continuously provide GPS coordinates). Alternately, the location providers can periodically provide location information such as at specific times or on the occurrence of definable events. For example, a user may define specific times when the location information should be updated. Alternately, the location information might be updated only when a device's location changes (i.e. a location change event). Additionally, the location providers might provide location information when polled by the location service module 602. For

1 example, the location service module 602 can call the location provider interface
2 700 and request location information from one or more of the location providers.

3 One specific location provider 606 is shown as a cache. The cache provider
4 essentially maintains a current device context or location. That is, once the
5 location service module 602 has ascertained its current location, it writes this
6 location to a cache. This enables the device 600 to ascertain its location with a
7 degree of confidence in the event all of the other location providers are not able to
8 provide location information (e.g. the GPS provider may not receive GPS
9 information because the GPS transmitter that supplies it with the information is
10 unable to contact a requisite number of satellites).

11 12 **Confidence and Accuracy Parameters**

13 One important and useful feature of the described embodiment is that one
14 or more of the location providers are configured to assign confidence parameters
15 and/or accuracy parameters to the information that they provide to the location
16 service module 602. Confidence parameters provide a measure of a provider's
17 confidence in the information that it provides to the location service module 602.
18 For example, assume that a GPS transmitter must receive information from five or
19 more satellites in order to provide highly confident information. Assume that only
20 three satellites are available at the time. The GPS transmitter would then transmit
21 its information based only on the three satellites. The GPS provider would then
22 know that the information it receives from the GPS transmitter was based only on
23 three satellites rather than the desired five or more. In this case, the GPS provider
24 can set a confidence parameter on the location information that indicates that it has
25 a lower confidence level than if the information were based on the desired five or

1 more satellites. In this case, the location service module 602 can take the
2 confidence parameters for all of the location providers into account when
3 determining the location of the device. This is discussed in more detail below.

4 With respect to the accuracy parameters, consider that the location
5 information that is received from the location providers is accurate to varying
6 degrees. Some information may be accurate to within one mile, while other
7 information may be accurate to within 100 feet. The location providers are
8 desirably configured to assign accuracy parameters to the location information that
9 they provide to the location service module 602. The accuracy parameters give
10 the location service module an indication of the accuracy of the information.

11 When the confidence and accuracy parameters are used by the location
12 service module 602, the module can make decisions on how to use the location
13 information it receives from each provider. For example, the location service
14 module 602 might disregard completely any information that has a low confidence
15 parameter. It might, on the other hand, strike a balance between the accuracy of
16 the information and its confidence. For example, the module 602 might be
17 programmed to use information with lower levels of accuracy only when there is a
18 high level of confidence in the information. The module 602 might utilize the
19 parameters to assign weights to the information so that the location is calculated as
20 a weighted function of the confidence and accuracy of the information.

21 Another use of the confidence parameters is as follows: Assume that the
22 location service module has determined a device location and has written that
23 location to a cache. At the time when the location is written to a cache, it is
24 assigned perhaps a high confidence level. Assume further that all of the other
25 location providers are unavailable to provide location information. For a period of

1 time, the location service module 602 can use the cache location as a current
2 location and be fairly confident that its information is generally accurate. In this
3 case, the location service module might assign a linearly decreasing confidence
4 level to the information over time so that at some point, it ceases to use the
5 information or informs the user that the information cannot be guaranteed.

7 **Location, Trust, and Timestamp**

8 When the location providers provide their information to the location
9 service module 602, the information can include, in addition to the confidence and
10 accuracy parameters, the actual location information in a known format, a trust
11 parameter and a timestamp. The trust parameter is a metric that is assigned by the
12 location service module 602 to one or more of the location providers and defines
13 the trust that the location service module has for the particular location provider.
14 The timestamp is a metric that defines the time when the location information was
15 provided by the location provider. This assists the location service module 602 in
16 ascertaining whether information is stale and might need refreshed.

17 Once the location service module 602 has all of the location information, it
18 can then set about determining the location of the device.

19 Fig. 8 is a flow diagram that describes steps in a method of determining a
20 device context which, in this example, is the device location. These steps are
21 implemented by the location service module 602.

22 Step 800 gets the current device context. The current context can be the
23 last calculated device context that is stored in the cache. Step 802 determines
24 whether any of a number of context providers are available to provide context
25 information. The location service module might do this by polling the context

1 providers to ascertain which of the providers are active and valid. Step 804
2 determines whether all of the providers are inactive. If all of the providers are
3 inactive, step 806 decreases the confidence in the current context over time and
4 uses the current context as the device context. Step 802 then continues to monitor
5 for current active and valid providers. If step 804 determines that one or more of
6 the context providers are active, then step 808 orders the active and valid context
7 providers. When the location service module 602 orders or sorts the context
8 providers, it does so as a function of the confidence of the provider's information
9 and/or the trust that the location service module has in the location provider. This
10 provides a ranked list of the location providers. Step 810 checks to ascertain
11 whether the context information appears to be correct. For example, where the
12 context is the location of the device, the location service module 602 might know
13 that five seconds ago the current location was Redmond, Washington.
14 Accordingly, location information that indicates that the current location is
15 Beijing, China would be incorrect. Step 812 then determines whether any of the
16 context information conflicts with either the device's current context or the context
17 information from other providers. For example, the location service module 602
18 can compare the context information from each of the context providers with the
19 information in the cache. If any of the information conflicts with the cached
20 information, then the information from that context provider can be discarded.
21 Similarly, if context information varies inordinately as between the context
22 providers, then step 814 can select the context providers having a predefined level
23 of trust and perhaps use just their information (Step 816). If there are no conflicts,
24 then step 816 determines the current context based upon the information that is
25 provided by all of the context providers. In the described embodiment, this step is

1 implemented by using the information to map to a particular node in one or more
2 of the hierarchical tree structures mentioned above. For example, the location of
3 the device can be ascertained by mapping the information to a particular node, and
4 then completely traversing the tree structure until the root node is reached. Step
5 818 then updates the current context by perhaps writing it to the cache and returns
6 to step 802 to determine the active and valid context providers.

7 The method described above provides a way for the location service
8 module to receive location information and use only the location information that
9 appears mostly likely to represent a current location. Conflicting information can
10 be discounted or disregarded thereby assuring that only the most trusted, accurate
11 and confident information is utilized to determine the device's current location.

12 13 **Self Monitoring**

14 In addition to the confidence and accuracy parameters, one or more of the
15 location providers are advantageously programmed to self monitor their own
16 operation for various irregularities that can occur. On the occurrence of an
17 irregularity, the location providers are configured to notify the location service
18 module 602. For example, the source from which the location provider receives
19 its information may go off line for a period of time so that the location provider is
20 unable to receive any additional information. In this case, the location provider
21 might generate a "provider out" message and send it to the location service
22 module 602. When the location service module 602 receives the "provider out"
23 message, it can then take steps to exclude the location information from that
24 provider from any location calculations that it performs. When the location
25 provider's source comes back on line, it can generate a "provider on" message that

1 informs the location service module 602 that it is able to transmit location
2 information to the module. Of course, the location service module can be notified
3 by the location providers on the occurrence of other operational irregularities, with
4 the above example constituting but one specific case.

6 Applications

7 Once the location service module 602 has determined the device's location,
8 it can receive queries from one or more applications 608. In the Fig. 7 example,
9 the applications include a web site application, an Outlook application, and a
10 service discovery application. In the present example, the web site application can
11 be any web site application that is capable of rendering location-specific services.
12 For example, the user of the device 602 might access Amazon.com's web site to
13 buy a favorite book. When the user purchases their book, Amazon.com must now
14 compute the taxes that the user must pay. In this example, a script executing on
15 Amazon.com's web site might query device 602 to learn of the user's location. In
16 this particular example, the device might respond to the query by returning the
17 state in which the user is making the purchase. Amazon.com can then assess the
18 tax automatically. Amazon.com might also desire to know where the individual is
19 located so that they can select an optimal shipping method (UPS or Express Mail).
20 Depending on where the individual is located, one method may be preferred over
21 the other. The Outlook application might query the location service module to
22 ascertain the location because it (or the operating system, e.g. Windows) may
23 change device settings based on the location of the computing device. For
24 example, the user may print on one particular printer while at work, and another
25 particular printer when at home. When the Outlook application determines that

1 the user has gone home for the day, it can automatically change the device settings
2 for the printer at the user's home. It might acquire the print settings from a
3 personal places data store 714. Thus, the device is automatically configured for
4 use depending on the user's location. The service discovery application might
5 query the device to determine its location so that it can render a particular service
6 depending on where the device is located. For example, if the user asks the
7 application to locate the nearest color printer, the service discovery application
8 might query the location service module to ascertain the device's current location
9 so that it can use this information and find the nearest color printer. Consider also
10 that the Outlook application could configure itself email to a work location (when
11 an individual is at work) or to a home location (when an individual is at home). In
12 addition, the Outlook calendar can become location aware, e.g. when you change
13 time zones, your appointments would show up in the proper time slots.

14 As one can imagine, the possibilities are seemingly endless. This
15 functionality is made possible through the use of the Master World and one or
16 more Secondary Worlds.

18 **Application Program Interface/Events**

19 In the described embodiment, the applications 608 communicate with the
20 location service module 602 through one or more application program interfaces
21 (APIs) and/or events. The applications can make function calls on the API to
22 query the location service module as to its current location. Similarly, the
23 applications can register for location notifications by using an events registration
24 process. For example, an application may register for a notification when the user
25 changes their location. Consider the case where an application requests to be

1 notified when the user arrives at work or at home so that the application can
2 change the device's configuration (such as printer configuration).

3 Fig. 9 is a flow diagram that describes steps in a method in accordance with
4 the described embodiment. The steps that are described are implemented by
5 device 600. Step 900 receives information that pertains to the current context of
6 the device. In this particular example, a portion of the information is received
7 from one or more context providers which, in this case, are location providers.
8 Step 902 processes the information on and with the device to ascertain the current
9 context of the device. In the illustrated example, the device maintains (or has
10 access to) one or more of the Master World and one or more Secondary Worlds.
11 When the device receives all of the location information, it maps the information
12 to a particular node in the hierarchical tree structure that defines the Worlds. It
13 then traverses the tree structures to ascertain the complete context (i.e. location) of
14 the device. Step 904 receives calls from one or more applications that request
15 information that pertains to the device's current context or location. In the
16 illustrated example, the applications can call one or more APIs to request the
17 information or the applications can register for event notifications. Step 906 then
18 supplies the applications with at least some information that pertains to the current
19 device location. As will be discussed below, a security policy or privacy policy
20 can be applied to the information before it is returned to the applications.

21 22 **Privacy Manager**

23 In one embodiment, a privacy manager 704 (Fig. 7) is provided. Although
24 the privacy manager is illustrated as being incorporated on the device, it could be
25 implemented by a trusted entity such as a trusted server that is not part of the

mobile computing device. The privacy manager can be implemented in any suitable hardware, software, firmware or combination thereof. In the illustrated example, the privacy manager comprises a software module that is incorporated in the mobile computing device.

The privacy manager 704 addresses privacy concerns that are associated with the information that is collected by the computing device. Specifically, the location service module can calculate detailed information regarding the location of the computing device. It may be desirable, in some instances, to filter the information that is provided to various applications. That is, it is entirely likely that a user may not want their specific location information provided to untrusted applications. In these instances a user might just desire for location service module 602 to inform such applications that the user is in the State of Washington.

Fig. 10 shows a flow diagram that describes steps in a privacy protection method in accordance with the described embodiment. These steps can be implemented by the privacy manager 704.

Step 1000 defines a plurality of privacy levels. Exemplary privacy levels are set forth in the table immediately below:

Privacy Level	Approximate Scale	Level of Revelation
0	-	No location information is returned
10	100,000 Km	Planet/Continent
20	1,000 Km	Country
30	100 Km	State
40	10-100 Km	City & County or Region

50	10 Km	Postal Code & Phone Area Code
60	1 Km	Full Postal Code (Zip + 4) & Area Code and Exchange
70	100 m	Phone Number & Building/Floor
80	10m	Room #
90	1m	Exact Coordinates

In the illustrated table, 10 different privacy levels are defined and each has an associated approximate scale. For example, a privacy level of 0 means that no location information is returned. A privacy level of 90 means that very detailed location information is returned.

Step 1002 assigns various privacy levels to the individual nodes in one or more hierarchical tree structures. For example, each node of the Master World and the Secondary Worlds can have a privacy level associated with it. The root node of the Master World tree structure might have a privacy level of 10, while the node that represents a current location in a Secondary World might have a privacy level of 90. Step 1004 determines the context of the computing device. In the present example, the context is the device location and examples of how this is done are given above. Individual applications that call the location service module can have privacy levels associated with them. These privacy levels can be assigned by individual users. For example, a trusted application might have a privacy level of 90, while an untrusted application might have a privacy level of 30. Step 1006 receives context queries from one or more applications. Here, an application calls the location service module 602 (Fig. 7) to ascertain the location of the device. Step 1008 determines the privacy level associated with the application or

1 applications. For example, if a untrusted application calls to request location
2 information, the privacy manager 704 would determine that the application has a
3 privacy level of 30. The privacy manager then traverses (step 1010) one or more
4 hierarchical tree structures to find a node with a corresponding privacy level so
5 that it can select the information that is associated with that node. In this example,
6 the traversal might involve jumping from the Secondary World to the Master
7 World to find the node that corresponds to the state in which the user is located.
8 Once the corresponding node is found, step 1012 returns the context information
9 (e.g. location information) associated with the node. In this case, the location
10 service module would inform the application that the user's location is the State of
11 Washington.

12 As an example, consider the following: There is a web site that gives up to
13 the minute weather of various locations. Accordingly, you might assign this web
14 site a privacy level of 60 so that you can receive weather information for the
15 geographical area that corresponds to your present full postal code. Another web
16 site might be a corporation intranet web site that is a trusted web site. Thus, any
17 applications associated with this web site can be assigned a privacy level of 90 so
18 that you can give them precise location information as to your whereabouts.

19 Thus, in the present example, the computing device is able to determine the
20 source (i.e. application) of its queries and modulate the information that is returned
21 to the application as a function of the application's identity. The computing device
22 is able to do this because it has access to the Master World and one or more
23 Secondary Worlds. The above description constitutes but one exemplary way of
24 accomplishing this feat.
25

Location Beacons as a Location Provider

In one embodiment, one of the location providers comprises a location beacon that beacons or transmits information to enable a computing device to actively participate in its current context. Location beacons can comprise standalone devices that can be retrofitted onto existing infrastructures, e.g. a smoke detector or wall outlet in order for the device to have a power source.

Fig. 11 shows an exemplary beacon 1100 that is mounted on a structure 1102. Structure 1102 can be any suitable structure such as a wall in a conference room or public place, a smoke detector, an electrical socket and the like. In the described embodiment, the location beacons are small inexpensive devices that can be permanently mounted in special locations such as conference rooms, building lobbies, airport gates, public places and the like. The beacons announce the physical location in the form of an EID and/or LUID to all mobile devices that are within range, such as laptops, tablet PCs, hand held computers, mobile phones, wearable computers and the like.

In the described embodiment, the location beacon can identify the particular locations by beaconing standard information that will be understood by the mobile computing devices. In the present example, the beacons can transmit one or two location identifier pairs comprising an EID/URL pair and a LUID/URL pair. The beacon might also transmit multiple LUIDs. The EID and LUID give the present node location in the Master World and Secondary World respectively. The URLs provide a reachable location for the Master and Secondary Worlds. For example, the URL associated with the Secondary World can give a service location that the device can use to query information about the Secondary World so that it can

1 derive its context and take advantage of resources or services that are associated
2 with the nodes in the Secondary World.

3 The beacons can also transmit a digital signature that can be used by the
4 device to ascertain that the beacon is valid and legitimate. Any suitable signature
5 or verification method could be used. In addition, and of particular use in the
6 context-aware environment, the beacon can be programmed to transmit code
7 download pointers to devices within range. The code download pointers can
8 enable the computing device to access software code that permits them to interact
9 with their environment. Consider the following example: You walk into a
10 conference room with your cell phone computing device and immediately a
11 beacon in the conference room transmits your location in the form of an EID/URL
12 pair and a LUID/URL pair. Your device uses the information pairs to ascertain its
13 location in the Master and Secondary Worlds as described above. The beacon also
14 transmits a code download pointer that points to software code that enables you to
15 operate the video projector in the conference room using your hand-held cellular
16 phone. In this manner, the beacon serves as more than just a location beacon—it
17 permits you, through your computing device, to actively participate in your
18 surroundings.

19 The beacons can transmit the information in any suitable way, e.g. wireless
20 methods including infrared and radio frequencies. In one embodiment, Bluetooth
21 short range radio frequency communication can be used to provide a low cost, low
22 power alternative.
23
24
25

Conclusion

The embodiments described above provide a uniform, standardized way to enhance the world of context aware computing. The embodiments provide a way for individuals to uniquely experience the world around them by ascertaining their location in the world in a standard way. The embodiments also provide a way for service providers to uniquely position their goods and services in a manner that is sensitive to and appreciates the contexts, e.g. locations, of various consumers of the goods and services. Unique and useful architectures and data structures are employed to facilitate the user's computing experience and provide for an individual-centric experience.

Although the invention has been described in language specific to structural features and/or methodological steps, it is to be understood that the invention defined in the appended claims is not necessarily limited to the specific features or steps described. Rather, the specific features and steps are disclosed as preferred forms of implementing the claimed invention.